Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies
Vol. 26, No. 4, August 2012, 637–651

'Murder, Incest and Damn Fine Coffee': *Twin Peaks* as new incest narrative 20 years on

Jason Graham Bainbridge[a]* and Elizabeth Delaney[b]

[a]*Swinburne University of Technology, Media Studies, Melbourne, Australia;* [b]*Independent scholar*

Despite the vast amount of critical and academic literature on the television series *Twin Peaks*, relatively little attention has been paid to its narrative and, more particularly, its treatment of incest. Yet this is where the series remains truly unique, even 20 years later, a popular culture, commercial, network television series that takes incest as its central narrative thread. In analysing the intertextual relationships between media and literature, this article argues that *Twin Peaks* offers a new narrative of incest, actually advancing our understanding of this issue and contributing new ideas to the body of knowledge on incest. It reveals that incest occurs amongst the white middle-class, in relation to girls on the cusp of adulthood and explores the difficulties involved in giving incest victims a voice. In this way *Twin Peaks* continually recasts incest, linking it to broader and broader social formations, so incest moves from being a familial issue, to a societal issue, to, ultimately, an issue with modernity itself.

Introduction[1]

'It all starts with *Twin Peaks*,'' writes *Herald Sun* television columnist Dianne Butler on the twentieth anniversary of the series' first screening, 'I love this show . . . Because of what it is, but also because of what it did for the industry, the way it said it was all right to treat TV like a film' (Butler 3). Therefore, despite its relatively short run and critical panning at the time, ABC's *Twin Peaks* (hereinafter *TP*) remains, perhaps, the purest example of what Caldwell (1995) terms 'televisuality,' that combination of the industrial, technical and authorial that became increasingly complex and more demanding of television audiences during the 1980s. In 1990, *TP* confirmed the possibility raised in *Moonlighting* that television could be an art form and it inventively blended the ongoing soap opera subplots introduced in *Hill Street Blues,* with the idea of the story arc, as presented in *Wiseguy*. It moved American Quality Television towards the 'quirky,' complex and filmic character-based dramas that are now increasingly prevalent on HBO and American commercial television and as such *TP* stands at the apex of televisuality, a summation of what came before and an indication of what was to come next. As *Age* television columnist Marc Spitz writes, *TP* 'changed television forever. Its odd tempo, black humour, brutal violence, pastoral beauty and nightmarish imagery inspired an adventurous new kind of TV serial, from *The X-Files* to *The Sopranos* to *Lost*' (Spitz 2010, 10–11).

For a while, *TP* received a great deal of attention in both the popular and academic presses: analyses of its aesthetics, its relationship with genre and postmodernity, its literary and visual allusions and its complex mythology. There is a book of academic essays devoted to *TP* (*Full of Secrets*), a special issue of an academic journal (*Film/Literature/Quality* 21: 4,

*Corresponding author. Email: jbainbridge@swin.edu.au

ISSN 1030-4312 print/ISSN 1469-3666 online
© 2012 Taylor & Francis
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2012.664114
http://www.tandfonline.com

October 1993), a continuing quality fan magazine (*Wrapped in Plastic,* Miller and Thorne 1992, ongoing) and a large fan base that still conducts conventions and special screenings.[2] Yet despite all of this attention relatively little work has been done on the series' thematic concerns, on 'what it is' (Butler 3), even though this is where *TP* remains truly unique; a pop culture, commercial, mainstream serial that takes the issue of domestic violence – and more particularly *incest* –- as its central narrative thread. Apart from occasional case studies in crime series like *Law & Order: SVU* and *Criminal Minds*, very few mainstream serials have tackled such difficult subject matter since and *TP* remains the only one to have conducted such an exhaustive and thoroughgoing examination.

This paper focuses on *TP*'s narrative. More particularly it explores *TP's* treatment of incest because the incest narrative in *TP* substantially differs from almost every other prominent fictional incest narrative. Drawing on examples from *TP* and its surrounding intertexts (the tie-in books, the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* and promotional materials) this paper outlines how *TP* advances our understanding of this social issue and concludes with a consideration of how *TP* actually contributes new ideas to the body of knowledge around incest. As incest is more frequently the subject of print literature than visual media forms, *TP* will be considered in relation to the body of popular incest literature, as a way of contextualizing, illustrating and illuminating some of the issues raised.

Twin Peaks' narrative structure

TP's narrative revolves around the murder of promiscuous prom-queen, Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee). Suspecting that this is the work of a serial killer, FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle McLachlan) is called in to assist the local authorities, under the leadership of Sheriff Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean). The investigation into Laura's murder reveals not only her double-life, but the double-life of the town as well. Underneath the veneer of *TP's* rural domesticity is a veritable hotbed of corruption (murder, drug running and prostitution), and mysterious, apparently supernatural, forces that dwell in the dark woods on the outskirts of the town. Ultimately Dale finds himself at the centre of a supernatural theosophist struggle between two mythic sources of good and evil, the White and Black Lodges.

Several episodes into the second season Laura Palmer's murderer is revealed to be her father Leland (Ray Wise), a lawyer and pillar of the community who seems to have been 'possessed' by a malevolent entity known only as BOB (Frank Silva). The series fragments into a series of soap opera/film noir subplots and a new story arc begins, focussing on Dale's former partner and friend, Wyndham Earle (Kenneth Welsh). Now a pathological killer who murdered his own wife – Caroline (Brenda E. Mathers), the first woman Dale ever truly loved – Earle lures Dale into the Black Lodge, one of *TP's* mythological sites and, depending on the viewer's interpretation, Cooper is either trapped in the Lodge or is himself possessed by BOB.[3]

We can identify *domestic violence* as the central narrative thread of *TP* because it is what links the two discrete aspects of the series, the Laura Palmer and Wyndham Earle investigations. The Leland/Laura and Wyndham/Caroline relationships are both steeped in domestic violence, with BOB remaining the constant symbol of domestic violence throughout. As if to confirm this we see BOB, Leland and Wyndham Earle together in the metaphysical 'Red Room' in the final episode of the series. Similarly domestic violence remains a thematic concern in *TP*'s subplots, in the abusive marriage of Shelley (Madchen Amick) and Leo (Eric DaRe), in the difficult relationship between the Marshes and in the

violent partnerships of Wyndham and Leo, and Josie (Joan Chen) and Eckhardt (David Warner).[4]

For the purposes of this paper, domestic violence will be understood in Kathleen J. Ferraro's terms as 'a code for physical and emotional brutality within intimate relationships, usually heterosexual' (Ferraro 1996, 77). Such brutality is played out in the domestic or family sphere and is governed by silence, with the most successful perpetrators of domestic violence being those who are able to inflict pain in ways that are not easily visible to the naked eye.

While the domestic space of the home is culturally constructed as a haven, a safe and nurturing place, Elizabeth Ward argues that:

> the family-as-haven is an ideological construct, obscuring the fact that for Daughters (at least) the family is a prison. The atavistic desire to maintain the psychic identity of the family keeps people (women and children specifically) isolated from one another, and therefore powerless. (Ward 1984, 87–8)

In *TP* the powerlessness and silence that governs victims is clearly demonstrated in the cases of Laura (a daughter, abused by her father/BOB, she can only give voice to her fears in her diary) and Shelley (a wife, abused by her husband Leo, she can only tell her teenage lover, Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook), some of what is going on).

Laura and Shelley also demonstrate that the domestic violence in *TP* has two main threads: *incest* (or child sexual abuse) and *wife battering* (which includes both physical brutality and psychological manipulation). Although incest and child physical *and* sexual abuse are often excluded from the category of domestic violence – as Ferraro explains 'domestic violence is usually thought of as "violence between adults"' (1996, 78) – within the world of *TP* they are inextricably linked through the figure of BOB who represents the common face of the perpetrator; in FBI Agent Albert Rosenfield's (Miguel Ferrer's) words, BOB is the 'evil that men do.' The series thus classes incest under the rubric of domestic violence, so much so that as the incest plot reaches its resolution, the acknowledgement and forgiveness of Leland's crime gives way to the repercussions of a different kind of domestic violence, between the heterosexual adults Caroline and Wyndham Earle. BOB is therefore the link between what at first glance seems to be two disparate parts of the *TP* series. He is 'the common enemy', implicated in the corruption of Leland and Wyndham and (at the very least) the deaths of Laura, Josie and (possibly) Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham).

Each part of *TP* is further supported by its own print intertext that explicates the thematic concerns of the series. *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* (Lynch 1990), while ostensibly detailing the life of Laura from age 12, features recurring accounts of her sexual abuse at the hands of BOB (in retrospect, following the revelation of the Leland/BOB connection, this quite clearly becomes an incest narrative). *The Autobiography of F.B.I Special Agent Dale Cooper: My Life, My Tapes* (Frost 1991) similarly details the life of Dale from age 13 and features recurring accounts of the domestic violence between Wyndham and Caroline (as well as establishing the triangle between them and laying the suggestion that BOB has been stalking Dale for some time).[5] The final intertext, the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992) (hereinafter *FWWM*) serves as both prequel (detailing the last seven days of Laura Palmer) and in some ways sequel (depicting the final fate of Annie and the ambiguity of Dale's imprisonment in the Black Lodge) to the series. As it is presented to an audience already aware of Leland's complicity it offers a relatively unambiguous incest narrative and thus serves to highlight and recast the entire series of *TP* as an incest narrative.

Twin Peaks as incest narrative

We can define incest as the forbidden sexual relations between family members. Originally the domain of religious law, incest gradually became part of secular law, largely in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with some variation between countries. It was not until the 1970s that incest became a topic of open discussion and was redefined as child sexual abuse. This change in definition recognized that fathers were not the only perpetrators and abusers and therefore incest was too narrow a category.[6] Since *TP is* concerned with sexual abuse between a father and daughter, incest is the most appropriate term. It not only recognizes abuse but recognizes that it occurs within the *domestic* space, the *family* space; Laura describes the way BOB comes into her bedroom and the one time we see Leland/BOB actually kill someone is in the living-room of Leland's house.

Foucault argues that the very basis of the family is potentially incestuous *because*:

> since the eighteenth century the family has become an obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love; that sexuality has its privileged point of development in the family; that for this reason sexuality is "incestuous" from the start… in a society such as ours, where the family is the most active site of sexuality, and where it is doubtless the exigencies of the latter which maintain and prolong its existence, incest… occupies a central place; it is constantly being solicited and refused; it is an object of obsession and attraction, a dreadful secret and an indispensable pivot. It is manifested as a thing that is strictly forbidden in the family insofar as the latter functions as a deployment of alliance; but it is also a thing that is continuously demanded in order for the family to be a hotbed of constant sexual incitement (Foucault 1978, 107–8).

Once again then Foucault identifies the *home* as the link between sexuality and violence, whether it is child sexual abuse, wife battering or rape.

TP's co-creator David Lynch similarly treats sex as a site of ambiguity and the contestation of power. For him, sex becomes 'the site of domestic trauma, fear, power and – on occasion – euphoria' (Rodley 1997, 125). It is noticeable that in *TP* sex is most often linked to these first three, 'trauma, fear and power' under the rubric of domestic violence/incest. Sex as 'euphoria', on the other hand, is constantly hinted at (between Bobby and Shelley, Donna and James, Ed and Norma, Dale and Annie) but indefinitely delayed because of the obstacles placed in their way, be they other partners (Ed and Norma must deal with their respective spouses, Nadine and Hank), issues (Donna continually feels Laura's 'spirit' is getting in the way of her and James) or events (Dale's fondness for Annie makes her the target of Wyndham Earle's revenge).

More particularly we can classify *TP* as an *incest narrative* because it shares a number of elements common to other incest narratives including, for example, that the incest is not revealed to the wider community. Here, the only ones who know the incest is occurring are the reader/viewer and perhaps one other character in the diegesis. In Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (written in 1819 but not published until 1959) the daughter's revelation comes in a letter that will only become public on her death. Laura's secret diary works in a similar way in *TP*. In Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1992) Ginny and Rose discuss the sexual abuse they experienced at the hands of the father but they are convinced that the community will not believe them as their father is a pillar of the community. They even feel unable to share their experiences with their younger sister Caroline who has escaped the trauma. Leland's social standing similarly works to insulate him from accusations in *TP* and his friendship with the Haywards prevents Laura from telling even her closest friend Donna what is occurring. In Georgia Savage's *The House Tibet* (1989), Vicky runs away and lives on the streets rather than tell, as does Lilian in Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* (1985), both becoming isolated from their families in the process. Laura is on a similar path when

Leland/BOB finally kills her. There is the suggestion, strongly reasserted in *FWWM*, that Laura is seriously considering running away with James.

TP quite clearly shares elements of these classic incest narratives, but it also differs in a number of important ways. As Doane and Hodges note, there are a 'wide range of ways to tell incest' (2001, 2) and they go on to identify four major types of fiction and non-fiction incest narratives. Interestingly, *TP* is none of these.[7] In place of any sort of feminist narrative about retribution for the wronged girl/woman, *TP* provides an exploration of the source of evil that brings about such violence and abuse and in so doing, blames the whole society for its occurrence. As Diane Stevenson argues, the way TP 'connects all sexuality and violence to the abuse of a daughter by a father in a middle-class home' implicates every person in the town in the commission of the crime.

> as if every person in town were but a part of a multiple personality generated by the abuse—as if not just an individual but a society had been formed in the incestuous cradle (qtd Lavery 1995, 77).

TP was first screened during a period of great public discussion around incest. Louise Armstrong argues that in the 15 years from 1975 to 1990 the discussion on the topic went from total silence to cacophony. During this period, stories of abuse became staples of television news, current affairs and talkback shows and incest became the subject of a number of feminist tracts, self-help books, and fiction. While Armstrong rejoiced in the fact that the subject was in the public arena, other writers, such as Katie Roiphe, called for an end to such interest, particularly in fiction. In 1995 Roiphe declared that incest had 'become our latest literary vogue' (Roiphe 1995, 71). Her concern was that these fictions were becoming politically predictable, with an 'astonishing sameness in the way they [the incest scenes] are staged . . . The irony is that while incest in life will never cease to appal us, incest in its written form is no longer shocking' (Roiphe 1995, 71).

This is not true of *TP*. *TP* does not feature the scenes Roiphe claims filled the incest literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s – 'descriptions of fathers taking their daughters on their laps and sliding their hands under their skirts or creeping into their bedrooms in the middle of the night' (Roiphe 1995, 65). While Lynch and Frost could have easily fallen back on such conventions, the incest in *TP* is expressed in different ways. This is partly because of the conventions of crime fiction that inform the series, but even here it differs from other father-daughter incest narratives in crime fiction that end with the discovery of the father's body, murdered by the daughter –victim who can take no more. Examples here would include Elizabeth George's *A Great Deliverance* (1988) and J.D. Robb's Eve Dallas series whose titular star killed her own father after no longer being able to cope with the abuse. In contrast, *TP* opens with the death of the daughter. This means that the most common feature of incest narratives, the struggle of girls/women to articulate their experiences, must also take a different form in *TP*. Articulating Laura's experience therefore becomes dependant on third parties, such as Dr Jacoby, Harold, James, the authorities and, most particularly, FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper.

Twin Peaks as *new incest narrative*

We can therefore consider *TP* to be a *new incest narrative* because it advances our understanding of incest in a number of different ways. The first is that *TP* is one of a small number of texts to make clear that incest occurs within the white middle-class family. Originally incest was considered to have only occurred among poor, lower class or black families.[8] Subsequent feminist, anthropological, sociological and social science research revealed that this was not the case,[9] but as late as 1997, when Kathryn Harrison released

her memoir *The Kiss* (1997), the occurrence of incest in middle-class families was still being publicly denied. While many incest narratives, like Harrison's, present it otherwise, Elizabeth Marshall argues that the white middle-class family was still being constructed as 'a nurturing unit in which the rapacious father is an impossible character' (Maxwell 1997, 403). *TP* offers not only the rapacious white middle-class father but also explores the 'impossibility' of trying to come to terms with that fact. *FWWM* reveals that Laura does not recognize her rapist as her father until after she has been warned … and therefore metaphorically depicts this 'impossibility' through the figure of BOB. Diane Stevenson draws attention to the fact that while families in TP society are largely middle class, BOB is from 'the lower class' (Stevenson 1995, 74). Thus the threat to the middle-class family potentially comes from outside 'normality in terms of the middle class' (Stevenson 1995, 74) with the appearance of BOB suggesting that this middle class itself imagines incest to be a 'lower class' crime. However, even if influenced by the evil BOB, it is the middle-class father that remains the perpetrator.

Secondly, while the incest in *TP* is undoubtedly between father and daughter, adult and child, it is complicated by the fact that Laura is on the cusp of adulthood. She has the sexual body of a young adult but still appears to have the innocence of a child, an idea constantly reinforced by the public face of Laura: the prom-queen photo that appears under the credits of almost every episode and replicated in almost every article about the series. Of course, over the series' run, the viewer learns that this is only an image Laura projected and that her innocence has been shattered in many ways, most notably through a drug habit and rampant promiscuity. Importantly, this does not impact on Leland's responsibility or excuse his abuse of her trust. It also overturns the potential to see Laura as a seductive daughter.[10] Her sexual promiscuity could potentially cast her as a 'temptress who corrupts men' (Davenport 1993, 256), however as Randi Davenport agues *TP* displaces the image of the seductive daughter 'by holding the incestuous father responsible for activities that it explicitly defines as criminal' (1993, 257).

Third, Laura's age when the incest began is also very different to the vast number of incest victims. The remnants of Laura's diary recovered from Harold's flat (Episode 14) – and subsequently reproduced as *The Secret Diary* intertext – reveals the repeated abuse of Laura since adolescence. The incest therefore *began* when Laura was just entering puberty. Typically in incest narratives, incest or child sexual abuse often *ends* at adolescence with the onset of menstruation and the possibilities of pregnancy. But incest in the world of *TP* begins during this passage from childhood to adulthood. Laura, Donna, Audrey, Ronette and all the other daughters of Twin Peaks, who are at risk from sexual abuse (and not just incest), may have the bodies of young women, but carry with them the naivety and innocence of children. Their vulnerability – and therefore their father's culpability and 'evil' – is thus underscored by *TP's* suggestion that sexual abuse is not restricted to a particular age.

Fourth, while incest is clearly a motive for murder, as noted above it is more often the father or perpetrator father figure who is killed when the daughter can no longer bear the abuse. Contrary to most incest narratives, in *TP* it is the daughter, the bearer of secrets, who is murdered. As *TP's* incest narrative begins with the discovery of Laura's body, much of *TP* is preoccupied with giving Laura a voice. This again sets *TP* apart from the majority of incest narratives, both fictional and biographical, which are told from the point of view of the daughter/abused girl.[11] Others, such as Marilyn French's *Our Father* (1996) and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1992), feature multiple points of view, telling the stories of more than one abused daughter. As Laura cannot tell her own story, her story has

to be reconstructed through the various bodies of evidence collected by the lawmen of *TP,* commencing with the autopsy of her own body. As Jane O'Sullivan argues:

> the dead female body is a persistent presence and indeed, constitutes the central character-under-construction, the impulse is not to re-animate the dead body so much as to re-articulate it—to make it a riddle that invites a solution, and a case that permits closure (O'Sullivan 1996, 237).

Interestingly, as Hughes observes, even in *FWWM* Laura remains an *emotionally* dead body, so that we never see 'the charismatic teenager who held Twin Peaks in thrall . . . ' (Hughes 2001, 181).

The lawmen gather information about Laura's movements in the days leading up to her death, interviewing her friends and colleagues about her behaviour in an attempt to articulate Laura's story by understanding who she really is. Through the course of these revelations Laura continually shifts from victim, to user, to victim again. Two of *TP's* intertexts also allow Laura to speak with her own voice, the aforementioned *Secret Diary* and *FWWM*. But for the duration of the series it falls to men, particularly Dale Cooper and Sheriff Truman, to give her voice. This is somewhat ironic given that Elizabeth Ward argues that it is 'the male supremacist social structure which creates a silence on the subject: most of the Daughters are unable to find someone who will "hear" them' (Ward 1984, 87). Ward goes on to say that there is nowhere for daughters to turn for help other than members of the family. The problem is that no one within the family is likely to believe her any more than the wider community. Laura turns to another outsider, the shut-in Harold Smith (Lenny von Dohlen), to look after her 'voice', her diary. Laura's voice also continues to exist in the recordings of her sessions with Dr Jacoby (Russs Tamblyn) and, following her death, there is also the sense that Laura is trying to speak to Dale, through his dreams/visions.

Fifth, *TP* explores the motives for Laura's murder. The first implication is that Laura has been killed so her secrets cannot be revealed, with Dale's dream/vision seemingly confirming this when Laura is described as being 'full of secrets'. Cultural silence often surrounds the issue of incest and revelation is anything but easy. Vikki Bell argues that the secrecy and silence in these incest cases comes from the intersection of violence and power:

> What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it *acts upon their actions*: an action on an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future . . . [whereas] A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends . . . it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities . . . (Bell 1993, 32–3).

Bell therefore concludes that the 'operation of power can achieve aims much more smoothly and successfully than the imposition of violence' (Bell 1993, 33).

This is an important point because incest acts are not always violent in terms of common understandings of force – sometimes they are rape, sometimes not – but they do all involve the exercise of power. It is this exercise of power that curbs the victims/survivors from talking about incest; it is this power that delivers secrecy. There is little sense that Laura would have been believed if she had spoken out, but in *TP* it is clear that the incest is violent and that Laura feels powerless. This is repeated in the *Secret Diary* and graphically depicted in *FWWM* when Leland/BOB beats Laura to death. It is also explicated in the series itself when Leland/BOB kills Laura's identical cousin Maddy (Episode 14). The scene begins with Laura's mother, Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie), on the ground – she's been drugged – with the implication that this is a common occurrence. Hence the narrative also features the absent mother of other incest stories – but whereas the absence is often caused

by death or ignorance, here her absence is chemically induced by Leland/BOB. While Sarah is 'absent', Maddie is punched, picked up and bashed against the wall, actions that are mirrored in Leland/BOB's murder of Laura in *FWWM*. Midway through the murder of Maddie, Leland even calls her Laura and, of course, the viewer has also been warned of the link through the vision Dale has of the Giant who declares 'it's happening again'.

Over the course of Dale's investigations a second implication becomes apparent, that Laura was actually killed because she had become sexually active outside the family home (and this appears to be confirmed in the prequel *FWWM*). Laura therefore threatened her father with loss, as Lynda Boose explains:

> The tangent at which the father and daughter meet is the line that potentially threatens almost every enclosing structure of the family unit. That boundary, moreover, is a double one: one of its markers defines the father's control over inner family space; the other, his authority in the space of the outside, cultural world. And the daughter's movement to cross that threshold and move out of the father's house, whether into the house of another man or into the world of paternal institution, threatens the father, familial or cultural, with loss (Boose 1989, 46).

As noted above, Laura is on the threshold of adulthood – and, potentially, on the threshold of leaving the family home – and by engaging in sexual activity with other men Laura further threatens her father with loss. Her autopsy reveals that she has recently had sex with three men and her long list of lovers is revealed to include Dr Jacoby, Benjamin Horne, Leo Johnson and Jacques Renaud. As depicted in *FWWM* Leland's sense of loss is signalled by him following Laura, Ronette, Leo and Jacques to their love nest and then killing his daughter after the other men have departed. It is also interesting to note that Ronette identifies BOB as the perpetrator here, rather than Leland.

Understanding BOB

One of the keys to understanding *TP's* incest narrative is in understanding what BOB actually represents. Famously, BOB entered the diegesis by 'artistic accident'; Lynch saw the set dresser Frank Silva crouching near the bed in a scene, kept him in frame and used him to provide an ending to the European direct-to-video version of the *TP* pilot (1989) (Rodley 1997, 163–4). Here, an 18-minute coda to the pilot revealed BOB was Laura's killer, a drifter who might have also been a personification of the devil. The coda provided the footage for Dale's dream and Lynch has referred to the fact that 'fifty per cent of *TP* was born because of being forced to do that closed ending' (qtd Hughes 2001, 117). BOB himself didn't appear in *TP* (the series) until Episode 3.

In the diegesis BOB is described by the one-armed man Mike as his 'familiar', he 'attaches himself to a human and feeds on fear . . . pleasures are his children' (Episode 13). BOB is one of the key mythological elements in the series, a denizen of the Black Lodge. Lynch describes him as 'an abstraction with a human form' (qtd Rodley 1997, 178) and this becomes apparent in *FWWM* where both Laura and Ronnette see BOB as the attacker/rapist rather than Leland. BOB clearly has a physical form. Similarly, Leland sees BOB reflected in the mirror before and after the murder of Maddie. While Rodley suggests BOB stopped the series becoming 'ultimately . . . just one of incest' (Rodley 1997, 179), there is no sense that Leland is aware the image is not his own. Within the diegesis BOB can therefore be understood as a personification of 'the evil that men do' (as Agent Rosenfield suggests) but, even more importantly, extradiegetically BOB is actually *making visible* this idea of domestic violence, quite literally giving a face to the change that comes over someone engaged in this act, the 'dual personality' so many accounts refer to. As Diane Stevenson suggests:

> 'that BOB the demon possesses Leland tells us that anyone could be so possessed, that the incestuous and the murderous do not arise from inside but are constructed from outside. The ambiguity of the fantastic is not an obfuscation here but an expression of a genuine uncertainty about our understanding of family violence (Stevenson 1995, 75)

BOB therefore becomes a way of externalizing this internal tension and therefore part of *TP*'s ongoing interest in inside and outside, surfaces and depths.[12]

Unlike other incest narratives there is no legal recourse in *TP* and, again, this can be read as a commentary on the incest narratives in crime fiction where legal recourse provides little comfort to the victim. In *TP*, Leland Palmer is never charged with the murder of his daughter. He is only arraigned for the murder of Jacques Renaud whom he suffocates with a pillow in the belief that he is Laura's murderer. This raises the question of self-knowledge; how much does Leland know about his own transgressions? He admits to the murder of Renaud, explaining that it was necessary to help him overcome the 'absolute loss' he experienced with Laura's death. 'Have you ever experienced absolute loss?' he asks. 'Deep down inside, every cell screams, you can hear nothing else'. There is clearly a distinction being made here between the crimes that Leland knows he committed (the death of Renaud) and the crime he is unaware of or not admitting to (the incestuous abuse of Laura and the murders of Laura and Maddie). With the face of violence presented as BOB, the implication is that Leland the man is innocent of the latter crimes and that BOB is the perpetrator. Indeed, a conversation between Dale and Dr Hayward concludes that Leland's transgression in killing Renaud is entirely understandable because parents should not bury their children. When shown a picture of BOB, Leland remarks that he knows him, that he used to live next door to his grandfather's summerhouse in Pearl Lakes. Again then, he recognizes BOB as an entity outside of his own body.[13]

The court scene where Leland comes before a judge is unusual, both in its setting (a bar) and in the way the proceedings are conducted. The law does not want to deal with Leland's murder of Renaud. Before starting, the judge offers his condolences to Leland on his 'heartbreaking loss' and comments that he 'knows Leland to be a fine and decent man' and that it is 'dreadful to see him under these circumstances' (Episode 11). In the bail hearing, Sheriff Truman further outlines Leland's fine character, describing him as a well-liked and well-respected member of the community. This disjunction between the fine upstanding pillar of community and the home abuser is one often seen in incest narratives. Here however, through BOB, *TP* is able to split these identities into two, rather than presenting them as facets of the same individual.

This allows the lawmen to forgive Leland so that in the end he is not prosecuted by the law but rather absolved by Dale (Episode 17). In an increasingly strange series of scenes BOB admits to the murders of Laura and Maddie. He says that Leland was a 'good vehicle', that he was 'a babe in the woods' with 'a large hole where his conscience used to be' and goads the lawmen to watch what happens when he leaves Leland (Episode 16). BOB then 'encourages' Leland to ram his head into the wall, over and over again, and he begins to die. It is then that Leland realizes that he killed Laura, further confusing the situation because he now starts to take responsibility for the crimes. He also talks about being possessed by BOB and how much he loved Laura.[14] Dale urges him to 'seek the path, look to the light' and Leland tells him that he can see Laura and that she's beautiful. He dies forgiven by Dale. Later Sheriff Truman, Dale, Albert Rosenfield and Major Briggs briefly discuss what occurred. Dale asks if it is 'easier to believe that a father raped and murdered his daughter?' This recalls Doane and Hodges' (following Judith Herman's) idea:

> that the daughter's disclosure of incest is often resisted not just by fathers, who stand to lose their families, jobs and liberty, but by the powerful members of communities—judges,

> lawyers, ministers—who do not want to think that incest occurs in the traditional families that they so prize (Doane and Hodges 2001, 57).

In contrast, Hughes suggests a more cynical reason for BOB, that:

> the possessing spirit BOB… neatly sidesteps the righteous indignation of television standards and practices by taking possession of Laura's abusive father as he rapes and murders her. God forbid that anyone should bring a respectable middle-class father's rape and murder of his own daughter into American homes, without some kind of supernatural possession to explain it away! (Hughes 2001, 133)

BOB therefore problematizes *TP* as incest narrative. While he makes domestic violence visible he also raises the possibility of disavowal.[15] 'I didn't kill anybody', says Leland towards the end, and the lawmen seem to agree with him, Doane and Hodges' 'denial and resistance' in action. Therefore we could claim that while *TP* is adventurous and daring in its tackling of the subject of incest/domestic violence, it is ultimately conservative in its treatment, transferring responsibility from the father to a supernatural 'other' – BOB.

Even if this was as far as it went, *TP* would arguably still be quite radical in the way that it uses BOB to reveal incest/domestic violence to be a *social*, rather than individual, issue that needs to be dealt with as a social evil, rather than on an individual basis. Recast in these terms, incest/domestic violence comes to threaten the very structure of society because it threatens families – the building blocks *of* society. But *TP* does go further than this for, as incest and domestic violence occur in private spaces, they have traditionally remained unspoken occurrences in modern society. However, following Lynch's ongoing interest in the conflation of inside and outside, surface and depth, *TP* goes on to provide a larger critique of patriarchy/modernity through this rubric of incest/domestic violence.

A critique of modernity

This critique is an impliedly postmodern one, not postmodern merely in the sense of aesthetics or intertextuality (what critics most often refer to when they call *TP* a 'postmodern series'), but *textually postmodern* in the sense that the primary investigator, Dale Cooper, employs a set of alternative knowledge structures, based around Tibetan mysticism and – some might argue Lacanian – dream interpretation, to help discern the 'truth' in each case.

As Sherwin (2000) notes, Dale is immediately set at odds with the other FBI agent, Albert Rosenfield. Whereas Rosenfield conducts autopsies, is practical and rational and scorns the local legends of Twin Peaks, Dale is more inclined to think 'outside the box.' Dale can therefore be distinguished from the 'classical and hardboiled versions of the detective' (Hague 1995, 136) by the very Jungian:

> trust he places in the intuitive dimension of his unconscious… Cooper's unorthodox crime-solving techniques, which include clairvoyance, precognitive and "shared" dreams, visions, and an obsession with Tibetan Buddhism, not only violate traditional ratiocinative detection but also generally fail to provide any real solutions to the "crimes" [rather]… his revelations more frequently lead to a set of larger, more unanswerable questions (Hague 1995, 136).

While these are *premodern* knowledges that Dale is drawing upon, the fact that they are used as a corollary to the modern system of law makes them *postmodern*. Dale is therefore representative of postmodernity, an intuitive detective whose methods (drawing on alternative knowledge structures), stand in place of 'brilliant logical deductions, high-tech forensics, and comforting rational solutions' (Hague 1995, 136). This need to resort to these methods when confronted with an amorphous entity like BOB also reveals the very limits of modernity – and the limits of the law that Dale embodies.

More importantly Dale's ultimate *failure* at the end of the series (whether possessed by BOB or lost in the Black Lodge) reinforces the *contingency* of making meaning, another important aspect of postmodernity. This point is explicitly made during the series when Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham) quotes the philosopher Heisenberg: 'What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning' (qtd Hague 1995, 137). It is also constantly reinforced throughout the series' narrative, confronting us with a dazzling variety of paradoxes and inexplainable events including Giants, backward-talking dwarves and women who turn into drawer-handles when they die (!). In this way, read as a postmodern text, *TP* demonstrates that the crime of incest/domestic violence and, indeed, reality itself – and the ways of approaching both – are contingent (upon our own subjectivities, upon what we can actually understand and 'rationalise', upon our systems of making meaning).

If we accept BOB as a personification of incest/domestic violence then the fact that Leland Palmer is both a lawyer and father to Laura means that BOB's possession violates modernity in two ways, attacking Leland both as representative of the legal system (lawyer) and totemic representative of the law (father). In either role Leland represents authority and BOB's possession overturns this authority. BOB is therefore emblematic of the contradictions in modernity – the 'thing in the dark' or premodern impulse modernity claims to have controlled – the human dark side, the non-rational, feelings, urges and desires that modernity does not and cannot deal with (as modernity only believes in rationality and progress), the same feelings, urges and desires that manifest themselves in incest and domestic violence.

Furthermore, for BOB to possess Leland there is the suggestion that he must have been an empty vessel to begin with. As lawyer to corrupt property magnate Benjamin Horne (Richard Beymer), Leland was privvy to Horne's aggressive property acquisition and underhanded business dealings. It is suggested that the modern approach to law has itself left Leland empty and subject to manipulation, perhaps 'the hole' BOB refers to before Leland dies. More disconcertingly, if we accept Agent Rosenfield's assessment that rather than simply being some paranormal entity BOB is 'the evil men do', modernity itself is revealed to be incapable of dealing with evil - and so is Dale, for by series' end he too has been replaced by BOB.

Two ideas emerge from this analysis. At the very least, *TP* suggests that modernity itself is incomplete, it has 'blind spots' and is therefore limited and circumscribed. Lyotard (1988) terms these blind spots 'differends', the things that go unrepresented or unheard. BOB and the notions of incest and domestic violence he embodies exist as differends, concepts that the modern system of law cannot understand and cannot provide a remedy for. More significantly, BOB can also be read as a figure of *deconstruction*. He overturns the traditional, modern hierarchy of law (represented by Leland Palmer) of reason over passion and rationality over irrationality and replaces it with the inverse, culminating in the murder of Leland's own daughter Laura.

TP can therefore be understood as a postmodern treatise on society's inability to deal with incest and domestic violence. *TP* tears apart the foundations of modern law – and, by extension, modern society (reason, truth and justice) – and in their place we are left with a collection of alternative knowledges that similarly fail; Dale ends the series starring BOB in the face and BOB's face is his own. The fact that *TP* is episodic television and was cancelled on this cliff hanger means that the resolution of the storyline has been endlessly (and indefinitely) 'deferred' (as Derrida might say); just as there is no easy answer to issues of incest and domestic violence, so too does *TP* end in ambiguity.

Conclusion

Criticisms of *TP* often refer to the series as being all style and no substance. Aesthetic rather than narrative analyses of the series further perpetuate this view. But this seems to miss the fact that one of the concerns of *TP's* narrative *is* surfaces and, more particularly, surface appearances: the public faces of Leland, Laura and even Wyndham versus their private pursuits, their true natures. *TP* therefore problematizes notions of inside and outside, public and private, surface and depth – and the resulting confusion between the two.

In this way, part of *TP*'s rationale is to make visible what often remains unseen (and unspoken) in other texts, to bring to the surface what is so often buried. This process involves not only the existence of incest in middle class, white communities but also the difficulties in dealing with incest (in terms of identifying the perpetrator, apportioning responsibility and reaching legal resolution). If we read *TP* as metaphor then BOB becomes the 'impossibility' of dealing with incest, the 'dual personality' of the perpetrator and the existence of incest as a social rather than individual problem. As such, *TP* fulfils the promise of 'televisuality' (Caldwell 1995) in that it combines the industrial, technical and authorial aspects of television to create a complex philosophical and sociological argument around both the function and contingency of incest/domestic violence and the ways in which we deal with both.

TP therefore functions as 'new' incest narrative not only by virtue of the fact that it is one of the few mainstream popular culture texts to deal with familial violence and incest but also through the contributions it makes to the literature – in revealing incest occurs amongst the white middle-class, in relation to girls on the cusp of adulthood and in the difficulties involved in giving incest victims a voice. In this way *TP* continually recasts incest, linking it to broader and broader social formations, so incest becomes a familial issue, then a societal issue and, ultimately, an issue with modernity itself. Here then is another reason to reconsider the legacy of *TP*, not only in terms of its rich aesthetic and prescient view of how television would develop, but in how it uses televisuality to make a vital contribution to the visibility and debate around incest in modern society.

Notes

1. The title of this paper is a contraction of *Bravo's* advertisements for their *Twin Peaks* reruns: 'Murder, gambling, incest, prostitution and damn fine coffee'.
2. All of this prompted television theorist David Bianculli to write that 'never before, in the history of television, had a program inspired so many millions of people to debate and analyse it deeply and excitedly for so long a period… [*TP*] generated the kinds of annotated scrutiny usually associated with scholarly journals and literary monographs…' (Bianculli 1996) something that would be echoed almost 15 years later in viewer responses to *Lost*.
3. Deleted scenes from the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* strongly suggest that Dale is still trapped in the Lodge and it is his doppelganger that emerges in the last episode of the series. Lynch has said as much in interviews and Dale's dream was subtitled 'Twenty-Five years later' in the extended European version, suggesting he will be trapped in the Lodge for that amount of time. But it remains debateable what the ultimate fate of Dale might be.
4. The possibility of domestic violence is also raised through the character of corrupt businessman Benjamin Horne (Richard Beymer) whose interest in the young prostitutes at One-Eyed Jack's almost culminates in him sleeping with his own daughter, Audrey (Sherilyn Fenn). Horne's paternalism again becomes an issue at the series' end, when his apparent fatherhood of Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle) results in more violence. Similarly, we could also include the psychological abuse of Ed Hurley (Everett McGill) by his wife Nadine as another example.
5. These print intertexts do not match perfectly with what is seen in the series (see Miller and Thorne 1993 for more details) but in the absence of contradiction they seem to establish a pattern

and context of violence in both Laura and Dale's lives. An additional print intertext, *Welcome to Twin Peaks: Access Guide to the Town* (Twin Peaks Productions 1991) (a fictional travel guide to the region) straddles both narratives and provides some account of the underlying mythology but does not refer to the domestic violence/incest narrative.

6. See Ellen Pollack (2003) *Incest and the English Novel 1684-1814*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Louise Jackson (2000) *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England,* London and New York: Routledge. For further explanation of the change in definition see Judith Lewis Herman and Lisa Hirschman (1981) *Father-Daughter Incest,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press and Elizabeth Ward (1984) *Father-Daughter Rape,* London: The Women's Press Ltd.
7. The first is the feminist incest story that draws attention to the vulnerability of the girl-child and the struggle to articulate her experience of incest and critiques patriarchal power and violence showing the need to work for political change. The second is the canonical incest story, or the recovery story, which focuses on the daughters healing and recovering after incest abuse. The third is the false-memory story which deals with concerns over the recovered memories being false. The fourth is the incest survivor memoir: book length autobiographical accounts about recovering memories of incest. While *TP* does highlight the vulnerability of the girl-child, and some of her struggle to articulate her experience, it does so – as will be discussed in more detail below – through the words of others than the daughter.
8. Narratives such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1979), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) all perpetuate this view.
9. See Judith Lewis Herman, Elizabeth Marshall (2004) 'The Daughter's Disenchantment: Incest as Pedagogy in Fairy Tales and Kathryn Harrison's The Kiss', *College English* 66.4: 403–426; and Doane, Janice, and Hodges, Devon (2001) *Telling Incest: Narratives of Dangerous Remembering from Stein to Sapphire,* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
10. The Seductive Daughter is a 'well-established part of literary and religious tradition' (Davenport 1993, 256) from Lot and his daughters in *The Bible* to Nabokov's *Lolita*, but as Davenport reminds his readers, feminist writers such as Judith Lewis Herman and Sandra Butler successfully argue that the daughter is not seductive or a temptress but a victim.
11. Including Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (written 1819 but not published until 1959), Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1979), Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1983), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1983), Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* (1985), Georgia Savage, *The House Tibet* (1989), Jean Vormair *Don't Touch Me, Daddy!* (1992), Stephen King's *Gerald's Game* (1992), Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss* (1997).
12. This will be developed further in the conclusion (see below) and refers to a line of questioning raised by Rodley who asks Lynch whether the fact that the series 'continually plays with a confusion of outside and inside' was "something that was on your mind" (Rodley 1997, 169). Lynch responds 'that's sort of what life and movies are all about to me' (qtd Rodley 1997, 169) and while the examples given are of sets (eg. the Lodge/forest) there is no reason this does not extend to character as well.
13. This also raises the possibility of BOB as abuser of Leland and Leland as perpetuator of this cycle of abuse.
14. Randi Davenport describes this scene as closely resembling 'the incest survivor's utopian fantasy of the father's confession of guilt. When Leland cries 'Oh God – Laura – I killed her – forgive me' and experiences full responsibility for his horrific actions which entail the daughter's loss of subjecthood, the desire of the incest victim to be freed or her own distorted sense of responsibility for the abuse is given powerful voice. Indeed, the death of Leland is the moment when the trope of the Seductive Daughter is perhaps most explicitly resisted' (Davenport 1993, 257–8). However, as will be discussed, the daughter never receives that acknowledgement nor does society; it is only the lawmen, particularly Agent Cooper, who hear this confession and then forgive Leland.
15. Here it is possible to link *TP* to a tradition of disavowal in popular culture, where evil becomes a separate persona and therefore abrogates the protagonist's responsibility. Think here of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader, Norman Osborne and the Green Goblin or even Bruce Banner and the Hulk. In just about all of these cases, the dual personality takes on a completely different physical form, indeed, this is an idea that underpins the entire superhero/supervillain mythology (see Bainbridge 2009).

Notes on contributors

Jason Bainbridge is Senior Lecturer and Head of Media Studies at Swinburne University of Technology. He has written widely on media representation, law and popular culture, toys and merchandising, the reporting of risk and chequebook journalism. He is the co-author of *Media and Journalism: New Approaches to Theory and Practice* (OUP, 2011).

Elizabeth Delaney holds a Master of Arts (English) from the University of Tasmania where she worked for eight years as a casual lecturer and tutor in Journalism and Media Studies and English following a 25-year career in journalism. She is currently working on a Master of History at the University of New England and a Master of Teaching at the University of Tasmania.

Filmography

Twin Peaks. 1989. (pilot of the television series, with additional scenes, released as a European feature), dir. David Lynch, Lynch/Frost Productions.

Twin Peaks. 1989. 29 episodes, dir. various, Lynch/Frost Productions, ABC (USA).

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me. 1992. dir. David Lynch, Twin Peaks Productions.

Bibliography

Bainbridge, J. 2009. 'Bad fathers: Reading the evil father in popular culture through *Star Wars, Spider-Man* and *Twin Peaks*'. In *Mis/representing evil: Evil in an interdisciplinary key*, ed. C.P. Burns, 271–96. Oxfordshire: Inter-Disciplinary Press.

Bell, V. 1993. *Interrogating incest: Feminism, Foucault and the law*. London: Routledge.

Bianculli, D. 1996. The dictionary of teleliteracy: Television's 500 biggest hits, misses and events. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Boose, L.E. and B.S.M. Flowers, eds. 1989. *Daughters and fathers*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Butler, D. 2010. Homage to a performer. *Herald Sun*, October 27, 3.

Caldwell, J. 1995. *Televisuality: Style, crisis and authorship in American television*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.

Davenport, R. 1993. The knowing spectator of *Twin Peaks*: Culture, feminism and family violence. *Literature/Film Quarterly* 21, no. 4: 255–9.

Doane, J., and D. Hodges. 2001. *Telling incest: Narratives of dangerous remembering from Stein to Sapphire*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Ferraro, K.J. 1996. The dance of dependency: A genealogy of domestic violence discourse. *Hypatia* 11, no. 4: 77–91.

Foucault, M. 1978. *The history of sexuality volume 1*. London: Allen Lane.

French, M. 1996. *Our father*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Frost, S. 2001. *The autobiography of F.B.I special agent Dale Cooper: My life, my tapes*. New York: Pocket Books.

George, E. 1988. [1995] *A great deliverance*. London: Bantam.

Grenville, K. 1986. *Lilian's story*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

Hague, A. 1995. Infinite games: The derationalization of detection in *Twin Peaks*. In *Full of secrets: Critical approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. D. Lavery, 130–44. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Harrison, K. 1997. *The kiss*. London: Fourth Estate.

Herman, J.L., and L. Hirschman. 1981. *Father-Daughter incest*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hughes, D. 2001. *The complete David Lynch*. London: Virgin Books.

Lavery, D., ed. 1995. *Full of secrets: Critical approaches to Twin Peaks*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Lynch, J. 1990. *The secret diary of Laura Palmer*. New York: Pocket Books.

Lyotard, J-F. 1988. In *The differend: Phrases in dispute*, Trans ed. G. Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marshall, E. 2004. The daughter's disenchantment: Incest as pedagogy in fairy tales and Kathryn Harrison's. *The Kiss. College English* 66, no. 4: 403–26.

Miller, C. and J. Thorne, eds. 1992. *Wrapped in plastic*. Arlington: Win-Mill Productions.

Miller, C., and J. Thorne. 1993. The darkness of futures past. *Wrapped in Plastic* 1, no. 3 (February): 11–14.
O'Sullivan, J. 1996. Gals on the slab: Fetishism, re-animation, and the dead female body. *Social Semiotics* 6, no. 2: 231–45.
Plummer, L. 1997. "I'm not Laura Palmer": David Lynch's fractured fairy tale. *Literature/Film Quarterly* 24, no. 4: 307–11.
Rodley, C., ed. 1997. *Lynch on Lynch*. London: Faber and Faber.
Roiphe, K. 1995. Making the incest scene. *Harper's Magazine* 291: 65–71.
Savage, G. 1989. *The house Tibet*. Melbourne: McPhee Gribble.
Sherwin, R.K. 2000. *When law goes pop: The vanishing line between law and popular culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Smiley, J. 1992. *A thousand acres*. London: Flamingo.
Spitz, M. 2010. The original killer show. *The Age*, Green Guide October 28 2010, 10–11.
Twin Peaks Productions Inc. 1991. *Welcome to Twin Peaks: Access guide to the town*. New York: Penguin Books, ACCESS Press.
Ward, E. 1984. *Father-Daughter rape*. London: The Women's Press.

Copyright of Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.